Debt

Categories: Phenomena

The word that settled in the ghetto Yiddish. It meant a product that, although it was assigned to the “ration,” could not be provided because it was unavailable.

For example, a food ration included 15 dekagrams of oil. But ultimately the amount actually distributed was only 10 grams per person. A “debt” was issued for the remaining 5 dekagrams, which was honored at distribution points once the supply of fresh oil became available.

Such “debt”, as the above example indicates, could refer to something general, affecting the entire population, or “local,” referring to the lack of a specific product at a distribution point to which one was assigned.

At the beginning, when rations consisted of products that were actually available in the ghetto, “debts” were a rare and rather “local” phenomenon. However, at the end of 1943, the ghetto supplies deteriorated so much that rations were assigned in order to reassure the population rather than to be actually collected. They included many products that were yet to arrive. It was then that “debts” became commonplace.

To some extent, “debts” were the result of chaos at distribution points. When rations were issued, the ghetto crowd, already living off the future assignments, wanted to receive products to which they were entitled as soon as possible, on the first day, without

waiting for their turn. People were afraid that they would not get certain products, and thus be reminded of the ghetto saying, “Go home and cook yourself 'debt' for the Sabbath.”

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Resources

Encyclopedia, s. 242.

Tags

provisions language of the ghetto everyday life

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